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OPINION

Peters will be remembered for his positive spirit

I talked with a handful of people last week about the death of longtime Bloomington resident Bob Peters.

Peters, who died June 25, was well known by many in Bloomington for his longtime advocacy on behalf of the disabled. He learned firsthand about the challenges faced by those who use a wheelchair to navigate through life. More than 50 years ago Peters, a newlywed, became paralyzed as a result of an afternoon of swimming.

Unlike the typical story of a person diving headfirst into shallow water, Peters was injured while splashing his nieces and nephews by performing belly flops in the shallow water of a Wisconsin lake. His final flop was more like a dive, and he hit his forehead on the bottom of the lake. That was enough to paralyze him for life. He was 24 at the time. Two years ago he published a book about the accident, and the months of recovery that followed, called "A Dive Too Deep."

The comments I received last week praised Bob for his contributions to the community, his advocacy for those with disabilities and his spirit.

I only spoke face-to-face with Bob one time. But when that day finally arrived, it was a lot like talking to an old friend.

Bob was a regular reader of the newspaper and would occasionally submit a letter to the editor. Other times he's simply send feedback, or a story, regarding something he had read. We had talked by phone and traded emails several times during the past five years.

I first saw him in person at a Bloomington City Council meeting. He was recipient of an annual award given by the

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city's Human Rights Commission. He spoke briefly about his life and thanked his wife Penny for her dedication and tireless companionship before the council moved on about its business.

But I didn't get a chance to talk to Bob that night. It wasn't until a year or two ago when I saw him at Heritage Days that we finally had a chance to speak in person. We talked for several minutes that day, much like we had by telephone several times previously.

The people I spoke to last week knew Bob through their shared experiences building a better community. I only came to know him in the final years of his life. He was still an advocate, he was still engaged in the community, but the like many people in their 70s, he wasn't as tireless as he must have been in his decades prior.

He may not have been as active in the causes he championed, but the spirit that everyone spoke about last week, it shined as brightly as ever when Bob and I would speak or correspond.

Bob's life may have ended, but the benefits of his efforts will be appreciated for generations to come. He won't be there to smile and greet me at a future Heritage Days festival, but the memory of his upbeat, positive spirit is unforgettable.

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